# UK textile waste crisis could cost councils £137 million without urgent reform



The UK’s textile waste management landscape is facing an existential crisis, according to a recent warning from WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme). If the sector collapses, the financial burden of dealing with unwanted textiles will inevitably fall on charities, local authorities, and consumers. WRAP estimates that the fallout could add £64 million in annual gate fees to the existing £73 million already incurred by councils for dealing with discarded textiles. This escalation is alarming, especially since the overall cost of managing used textiles in the UK is projected to hit £200 million annually by 2035 if immediate action isn’t taken.

Catherine David, incoming CEO at WRAP, articulates the stakes clearly: “The impact of this sector folding will be catastrophic.” A decreasing number of reusable items has plagued the industry, leading many recycling businesses to operate at a loss. "Generating and increasing the value of our worn-out clothing must be fast-tracked if the industry is to be salvaged," David added, emphasising the urgency for innovation in textile recycling.

The crux of the issue lies in a confluence of factors. Nearly half of used textiles in the UK—around 35 items per person annually—are disposed of in general waste bins. This trend is partially driven by the proliferation of low-quality fast fashion, resulting in a staggering 57.5% decline in value for collected textiles over the past decade. Such a sharp drop not only hampers charitable organisations but also strains local authorities’ budgets, forcing them to struggle between escalating landfill fees and incineration costs.

In response, WRAP has identified three avenues for salvaging the textile recycling sector: advanced automated sorting, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), and a reimagined approach to retailer take-back schemes. The ACT UK project, which involves 18 partners from various segments of the textile value chain, seeks to establish advanced sorting facilities. Such centres would create a more efficient pathway for reprocessing textiles, thereby reducing landfill contributions significantly.

Recent trials by WRAP indicate that public engagement is essential for recycling initiatives. During ACT UK’s collection efforts, an impressive 46% increase in textile donations was reported when the public had a chance to contribute worn-out items alongside those in better condition. This data reinforces the argument for a structured and well-supported recycling initiative.

Support for the EPR scheme has gained significant traction across the textile industry, but it is clear that this cannot be the sole strategy for overcoming current challenges. Collaborative approaches are being explored, including building a network of 25,000-ton capacity recycling facilities and co-designing effective retailer take-back schemes.

The reality is stark: as low-quality fast fashion dominates and warehouse stock overflows, the UK’s economy could face a potential £200 million annual loss due to the lack of effective textile waste management. Urgent government intervention is necessary to avert further environmental degradation and to stimulate a sustainable framework for the entire textile sector.

Support for an eco-modulated EPR scheme, which is already gaining attention in various regions globally, could incentivise sustainable design practices and bolster recycling capabilities. WRAP plans to partner with leading brands to establish a robust EPR framework within the next year, facilitating the necessary structural change to make the UK textile sector more sustainable.

With a public increasingly aware and willing to recycle, WRAP’s vision of a circular economy for textiles seems both feasible and essential. However, this can only be achieved through coordinated efforts among all stakeholders involved—charities, local authorities, retailers, and consumers must align their goals towards a more sustainable textile ecosystem.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.innovationintextiles.com/call-for-epr-scheme-for-uk-textile-waste/), [[4]](https://www.letsrecycle.com/news/incineration-of-textiles-could-cost-uk-economy-200m/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.innovationintextiles.com/call-for-epr-scheme-for-uk-textile-waste/), [[2]](https://www.wrap.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases/price-our-addiction-cheap-fast-fashion-pressure-builds-uk-second-hand), [[5]](https://resource.co/article/uk-households-chuck-49-cent-textiles-residual-waste-bin)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.wrap.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases/what-extended-producer-responsibility-epr-scheme-uks-fashion-and), [[6]](https://www.letsrecycle.com/news/wrap-releases-faqs-report-on-textiles-epr/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.circularonline.co.uk/news/wrap-recommends-uk-gov-adopt-epr-for-fashion-and-textiles/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.innovationintextiles.com/call-for-epr-scheme-for-uk-textile-waste/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.wrap.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases/price-our-addiction-cheap-fast-fashion-pressure-builds-uk-second-hand> - WRAP's research reveals that nearly half (49%) of used textiles in the UK are discarded in general waste bins, equating to 35 items per person annually. This surge in waste, coupled with the influx of low-quality fast fashion, has led to a 57.5% reduction in the value of textiles collected by banks and a 41% decrease for charity shops over the past decade. WRAP urges stakeholders to support the reuse and recycling sector through grants, investment, and legislation to foster a more circular fashion ecosystem.
3. <https://www.wrap.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases/what-extended-producer-responsibility-epr-scheme-uks-fashion-and> - WRAP has published two reports recommending the UK government implement an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme for the fashion and textiles industry. The reports outline policy options and a cost-benefit analysis, emphasizing the need for eco-design criteria, restrictions on landfill and incineration, and increased recycling capacity. WRAP advocates for industry engagement to ensure new policies align with international developments, such as the EU's strategy for sustainable and circular textiles.
4. <https://www.letsrecycle.com/news/incineration-of-textiles-could-cost-uk-economy-200m/> - The UK's textile waste management challenges could cost the economy approximately £200 million annually. With limited recycling capacity, excess stock is often incinerated or sent to landfill. The situation is exacerbated by the dominance of low-quality fast fashion, leading to warehouse overflows and disrupted global markets. Industry leaders call for urgent government intervention to support the sector and prevent further environmental harm.
5. <https://resource.co/article/uk-households-chuck-49-cent-textiles-residual-waste-bin> - WRAP reports that 49% of UK households dispose of textiles in general waste bins, amounting to 35 items per person each year. This trend, driven by the prevalence of low-quality fast fashion, has resulted in a 58% decline in the value of textiles collected by banks and a 41% decrease for charity shops over the past decade. The charity emphasizes the need for improved infrastructure and consumer behavior to support the reuse and recycling sector.
6. <https://www.letsrecycle.com/news/wrap-releases-faqs-report-on-textiles-epr/> - WRAP has released a report addressing frequently asked questions about the proposed textiles Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme. The report highlights the UK's current lack of a national EPR system for textiles and notes that while the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) has indicated support for such a system, progress has been slow. The report emphasizes the need for further stakeholder engagement and clarity on the scheme's governance.
7. <https://www.circularonline.co.uk/news/wrap-recommends-uk-gov-adopt-epr-for-fashion-and-textiles/> - WRAP has published two reports recommending that the UK government adopt an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme for the fashion and textiles industry. The reports outline policy options and a cost-benefit analysis, emphasizing the need for eco-design criteria, restrictions on landfill and incineration, and increased recycling capacity. WRAP advocates for industry engagement to ensure new policies align with international developments, such as the EU's strategy for sustainable and circular textiles.